Greek Influence on Egyptian-Coptic : Contact-Induced Change in an Ancient African Language

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Book Review

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Eitan Grossman, Peter Dils, Tonio Sebastian Richter, and Wolfgang Schenkel, (eds.), *Greek Influence on Egyptian-Coptic: Contact-Induced Change in an Ancient African Language* (DDGLC Working Papers 1. Lingua Aegyptia, Studia Monographica 17). Hamburg: Widmaier Verlag. 2017.

The issue of language contact between Greek and Egyptian is not new but remains relatively understudied. The book under review here constitutes a fine collection of articles relevant to the topic, with a wide range of issues dealing with language contact generally, and as promised, providing information on how Greek affected the Egyptian language more specifically. This latter theme is present in most of the articles, with many of the authors pondering whether or not Greek loanwords were really a genuine part of also the spoken language (Almond, Egedi, Grossman & Richter, Hasznos (including an interesting parallel to Greek loanwords in Syrian, p. 239), Müller, Oréal, Grossman & Polis, Funk, Bosson, Boud'hors, Shisha-Halevy, Behlmer), while some others concentrate on clarifying the language contact situation in broader terms, albeit always including the Greek effect (Bagnall, Quack, Zakrzewska). One author, Torallas Tovar, takes the opposite approach and describes Egyptian borrowing in Greek, a justified addition to the overall topic of Greek-Egyptian language contact.

The book consists of four parts. The articles offer interesting information on Greek influence in both the literary and the documentary genre, doubtless new to most readers. Perhaps slightly out of place, although tied in with the diachronic contact linguistic context Egyptian has, is the fourth part describing Semitic and Arabic loanwords (Winand, Richter) that entered Egyptian. While not strictly within the theme described by the title of this edited volume, they do however "conclude the story" of Greek-Egyptian contact, Arabic taking over as the first language of most Egyptians in the centuries coming after the Greek reign, and Semitic loanwords being already integrated into Egyptian before the Greeks came—this connection and timeline relating to the Greek contact is also indicated in the Preface the editors have composed. Here, I first

outline the contents of the book in general, and then focus on a few points more specifically.

The volume starts with a linguistic introduction (Muysken)—this, in fact, constitutes the first part of the book—which is excellent. Not every reader of this book will be aware of the general principles of the linguistic study of ancient languages. This introduction also includes some basic information on Egyptian, and its long history through various stages. It is absolutely necessary to be aware of the terminology used for the different stages of the Egyptian language to be able to read any linguistic studies on it. One of the issues Muysken takes up is the fact that since Egyptian has the longest known written history of any language in the world, it is an excellent target for research relating to long-term language change and variation. He is right to emphasise this, as this long history of documented language use also includes several long periods of language contact, with Greek, with other Semitic languages, and finally, with Arabic.

There can, indeed, be a lot to learn from this treasure of linguistic contact material, but Muysken also brings up the fact that not all authors connect their studies to the contact linguistic literature. While he concedes that this is not problematic, as the issues under study regardless remain contact linguistic in nature, it has to be said that a more unified approach in this might have made the book more easily accessible to the general linguist/typologist wishing to use the rich material provided by Egyptian as evidence for contact linguistic research. As such, the readership of this volume might be restricted to Egyptologists, as the lack of a general linguistic framework will no doubt make some of the studies more difficult to grasp without a working knowledge of Egyptian.

Nonetheless, Muysken's introduction to the different types of language contacts and especially his table on the typical language contact scenarios in the world's languages (5–9), to which he compares Coptic, will probably aid even those readers with limited (or no) knowledge of Egyptian. It will also contribute to the reading experience of the non-linguist Egyptologist/Classicist who needs the book for a better understanding of nonstandard language use such as presented in the various articles, especially frequent in documentary texts. Particularly useful is the explanation of the phonological integration of loanwords (7–8) which relates to the use of Greek infinitives, studied in depth by Grossman & Richter (207–236). The non-linguist, ancient-language reader will also benefit from the idea of a bilingual continuum, proposed by Muysken (10–11), that possibly stretched from societal bilingualism to literary bilingualism, two extremities with very different linguistic outcomes.

After the linguistic information, there follows the second part of the book, which is also somewhat introductory in nature. This section is devoted to giving

the reader cultural background information, on, for example, the co-existence of Egyptians and Greeks in Roman period Egypt (Bagnall, 19–26), on the emergence of the Coptic script (Quack, 27–96), on the other side of the language contact, i.e., information on Egyptian borrowings in Greek (Torallas Tovar, 97–113), and finally thoughts on the nature of Coptic, often reported to be a 'mixed language' (Zakrzewska, 115–161). After this part, the linguistic analysis proper begins in Part 3.

The third part is concerned with how various Greek parts of speech are integrated into Coptic; naturally, Greek loanword use is at the heart of the volume, given that many of the papers moulded into articles in the present volume were presented in the beginning conference of the project *Database and Dictionary of Greek Loanwords in Coptic* (DDGLC, Freie Universität Berlin). To start with, Almond (165–194) goes through the much-neglected topic of the strategies of using Greek adjectives in Coptic. The subject is highly interesting in general terms for contact linguistics, but all the more so because Coptic did not have a part of speech completely comparable to the Greek adjective. Perhaps not surprisingly, the use of adjectives stems from the translation of the Greek bible into Coptic, but even during later periods they were still used in native language literature. In addition to the analysis of Greek adjective integration, however, Almond's text is also interesting in that it offers glimpses of early dialectal texts coming from the 'minor dialects', i.e. not Sahidic or Bohairic; according to Almond, the use of Greek adjectives was already systematic in the earliest Coptic literary texts. Interestingly, they were completely absent in Demotic texts in independent position, and only used as attributes to Greek nouns.

Many of the rest of the accounts in the third part concern loanword integration in one way or another, with various strategies presented. Due to the restrictions presented by the length available for the review, I have chosen two of these for a more thorough examination because they might be the most beneficial to the Greek linguist working with papyrological material, these originally Coptic features having in some cases been transferred to the language use of some L2 Greek users and thus sometimes surfacing in Greek texts. The articles in question are by Grossman & Richter (207–236) regarding Greek verb integration into Coptic, and by Boud'hors (423–439) regarding Greek loanwords in Fayyumic documentary texts.

Both of these articles concern Greek loanword integration into Coptic, taking sometimes quite surprising forms due to phonetic erosion and further integration in a dialectal context. Because the outcome of language change might seem on the surface level to be morphological but caused at least partially by phonological processes, it may not seem clear to a reader not familiar with

Egyptian-Coptic. Therefore, it is worthwhile to understand them when working with Greek documentary papyri.

The article by Grossman & Richter was initially two separate works by the two authors. These were joined as one in this volume, a commendable move, as each expert thus brings his strong suit to the study. The issue at hand is the diachronic variation in loan-verb integration strategies in Coptic, showing different forms synchronically, creating the appearance of different source forms for different dialects.

Coptic dialects varied in that some used a light verb construction with Greek verbs, while some directly inserted the Greek verb into a Coptic sentence. To give an example, below are variants of the same Greek verb in three Coptic dialects using different strategies (pp. 208–209).

Bohairic	**Manichaean Lycopolitan**	**Sahidic**
a-f-er-keleuin	*a-f-r-keleue*	*a-f-keleue*
PST-3SGM-do-command	PST-3SGM-do-command	PST-3SGM-command

As can be seen from the Bohairic and Lycopolitan dialectal forms, the verb integration has been done by using a light verb strategy, i.e. preceding the Greek verb proper by a Coptic auxiliary verb, *er-* 'to do'. There are, however, two differences between these forms: Bohairic still uses the whole form of the Coptic auxiliary and what appears to be the Greek infinitive ending, while Lycopolitan has dropped the initial vowel of the auxiliary and also the ending looks different, like that of Greek imperative.

In Sahidic, on the other hand, there is no light verb construction at all; the verb has been inserted into the Coptic structure as such, without an additional native language 'introductory' auxiliary to mark it as a verb. Sahidic also uses the shorter of the endings, the one that is similar to Greek imperative. For this reason, as this form looks more like a Greek imperative form than an infinitive one, it has been supposed before that the source for the Greek verb for some Coptic dialectal areas was this, the imperative, while others, such as Bohairic, would have taken the Greek verb in its infinitive form. Grossman and Richter prove in their article that this is, in fact, not so. According to them this was essentially variation that *seemed* synchronically motivated with dialect-specific different forms, but was in reality a result of diachronic change.

There have been many attempts at explaining the verb form differences in Coptology, but the one argued for here is not based on morphosyntactic theo-

ries of, for example, some dialects spelling out the light verb, while others use it in a 'covert' form (one of the former theories, trying to explain why the light verb strategy was not used by all the dialects, p. 210). Rather, Grossman and Richter argue that the different forms are based on the same original donor form, the infinitive, that underwent partly phonetic, partly morphological reduction by first dropping the Coptic auxiliary as the verb started to feel more 'own' (i.e., Coptic) in time, then the *-n* ending, the clear differentiator of the Greek infinitive form from the imperative one (p. 224).

While it seems clear that this rationalisation is in the right, it is not as clear to me why, instead of the psycholinguistically favoured order of things, with the verb first gaining 'acceptance' and then losing the Greek original infinitive ending, it could not have happened the other way around. Is it not possible that the *-in* ending was the first to stay behind, this being one of the more frequent phonological features of Greek in Egypt, no doubt influenced by the Egyptian-Coptic structure—and when this had happened, the form already had the appearance of an imperative, and was more easily accepted then as part of the native language lexicon? This usage was, at any rate, probably enhanced by the fact that in Coptic, the infinitive and the imperative had the same form (pp. 221–222).

The infinitive/imperative variation is a source of confusion also in L2 Greek texts, especially documentary ones, the L2 Greek writers not managing to make a distinction between the two forms, and leaving the editors sometimes guessing as to which one might have been meant semantically (see e.g. O.Claud. 2.243 for the nonstandard usage of πέμψον; Leiwo 2010, 2017). What is important for Greek linguists, however, is to recognise these differences in L2 Greek texts coming from different areas: Greek verbs ending in *-e*, such as πεμψε in the Mons Claudianus ostraca (O.Claud. 2.243), could semantically be meant to be as much infinitives as *-in* ending verbs in the Narmouthis ostraca (O.Narm. 78 κατελθῖν, for example), although the first of these verb forms looks more like an imperative. O.Narm. material comes from Fayyum and the verb form is probably related to the area's standard orthographic form for a Greek (infinitive) verb, bearing in mind that Greek verbs are also inserted in the same form into the Demotic texts of this bilingual collection (ODN). O.Claud. material, on the other hand, comes from the Eastern Desert, and it might be assumed that the form of Coptic known to the writer might have been the literary standard, Sahidic, and consequently the infinitive form in Greek could have been chosen after the same model. It seems like a likely scenario that the influence, as suggested by Grossman and Richter, might have flooded from Egyptian to Greek rather than the other direction; the correspondence, after all, took place in Egypt.

Another (partly) phonologically motivated issue important to Greek linguists is taken up in Boud'hors's analysis of some Greek loanwords found in Fayyumic documentary texts (pp. 423–439). This is a collection of texts that all come from a late date, the earliest from the 8th century. Variation in them is abundant, and Greek loanwords almost unrecognisable. Greek linguists might feel joy for some of the Greek phrases used in Coptic letters as greetings, for instance '*tirēnē nek*' meaning 'peace be with you', and the extensive use of *kalōs* in sentences, meaning 'warmly'. It is not surprising that there should be this Greek element in the Coptic of Fayyum because it was, after all, one of the most bilingual areas in Roman period Egypt. What might be a bit unusual, however, is that Greek verbs are used for very frequent functions, such as δέχεσθαι instead of the Coptic equivalent for 'to receive', *dji*. Furthermore, it requires some expertise to recognise it, as it is in the form *er-deki* (in the sentence *aierdeki npekshai*, 'I have received your letter'), the Greek loanword very much shortened after the Coptic auxiliary; the light verb structure was the way to incorporate Greek verbs into Coptic in the Fayyum area. There are only two occurrences of this verb in the Fayyumic documents, but nevertheless the usage is striking. Boud'hors believes this to be related to a general phenomenon of locally resurrected epistolary formulas, together with common words of both Greek and non-Greek origin, and used in new constructions. I agree whole-heartedly with her that it would be interesting to find out under which circumstances this rather late development for renewed Greek usage developed (pp. 425–426).

Along with peculiar ecclesiastical and monastic vocabulary that does not appear in Greek texts, there is administrative vocabulary that is worth mentioning. One of these is πιττάκιον (p. 426), which in Coptic use seems to mostly mean 'message' out of all the Greek meanings ('tablet for writing, ticket, receipt, list, written message'). Semantic change in loanwords is not unusual, and it is in fact one of the phenomena the DDGLC project studies within the context of language contact, although Boud'hors does not mention this relation to contact linguistics. Generally, this is one of the articles with fewer or no clear references to a general linguistic framework, although how much it is needed in this case might be asked—the article is very clearly written and should be accessible to any Greek or Egyptian scholar. It might, however, be interesting to a linguist reading the volume, and this type of semantic narrowing has been discussed in a broader context in e.g. Crowley and Bowern (2010: 200–201), along with other types of semantic and lexical change, most, if not all, of which can surely be found in the Greek-Egyptian contact (see e.g. Grossman and Polis in the same volume about the Coptic usage of the Greek preposition *kata*). It is interesting in many cases to see the outcome of these borrowing processes—it is also good to keep in mind that L2 Greek users might have used the Greek

words with the meanings decided for them in L1, as some of the words have quite odd meanings in the Coptic context, for instance using κίνδυνος ('danger, responsibility') to mean 'under my responsibility' in a Coptic expression *pros pakindynos*.

Boud'hors gives good, detailed explanations for most of the unusual vocabulary used in Greek in Fayyumic documents, worthy of a look for anyone interested in semantic change or loanword development in general, and for Greek linguists translating papyrological material; as mentioned above, these types of phrases sometimes show up in L2 Greek documents as well, particularly in administrative texts, challenging traditional translations (see e.g. Renberg and Naether 2010; more examples in Clackson 2010). However, probably the most valuable subject in Boud'hors article is the description of the form of Greek loanwords in Coptic, as they are so much altered from their original shape that they are extremely difficult to recognise—a topic already addressed by Sarah J. Clackson (2010: 77). Some examples of this are the heavily modified Greek verb ἐπιθυμεῖν as *el-pethemin* (including the Coptic auxiliary discussed above, affected by *lambdacism*) and the noun ἀπόκρισις as *apokres* and *apogris*; many more are found in the Appendix 3 of the chapter. Sometimes the same principles of integrating Greek phonology into Coptic are seen also in L2 Greek production in documentary material (see Dahlgren (2016, 2017), and Gignac 1976), so this could again be something to interest Greek linguists working with papyrological material.

Boud'hors states explicitly that the phonological transfer phenomena are not exclusively found in Fayyumic but in Coptic more generally, and refers to the works of Gignac (1976) and Girgis (1966) for more detailed descriptions (especially Gignac (1991) makes the connection between the similar nonstandard orthography of the languages, emphasising Coptic phonological impact on Greek in Egypt). This is understandable if it is assumed that the readers only come from the worlds of Greek and Coptic studies, but some kind of short introduction to the basic features might have been nice for the sake of the reader coming from a more general linguistic background—mentioning that the changes "are mainly changes between certain consonants and between certain vowels" (p. 430) is very vague for anyone not already invested in the subject matter, and I daresay also not known to some Greek or Egyptian scholars, if they have not worked with documentary papyri. Luckily Boud'hors lists some of the more frequent variants in Appendix 3, even if this is without any reference to Coptic phonology.

This is one of those instances that make the book slightly less accessible, if it has indeed been thought to contribute to typological theory, as stated by Grossman and Richter (p. 208, the same volume). Of course, good articles have a way

of circulating independently, but much of the material in this volume would have deserved a wider audience among historical linguists and typologists, who probably will not go through the trouble of interpreting the somewhat field-specific conventions in some chapters of the volume.

One thing typically Fayyumic mentioned by Boud'hors is the word-final vowel being frequently reduced to /i/, as it is in the Fayyumic Coptic dialect. For example, the word 'man, human being' is written *rōme* in Sahidic, the literary standard language, and *lōmi* in Fayyumic (also visible in the form is *lambdacism*, the tendency for Fayyumic to use /l/ where other dialects have /r/). This is interesting because the feature is clearly visible in e.g. the Narmouthis ostraca, one of the earliest Greek texts coming from Fayyum. It is interesting because the nonstandard ⟨i⟩ occurring in the word-final syllable is often replacing *eta* or the diphthong ει, and therefore the variation has without hesitation been taken to be evidence for the raising of these phonemes to [i] already at this stage. The original source for it might be completely in the Greek development, as argued by Funk (same volume, pp. 387–388), but there were dialectal differences that need more investigation. In the Narmouthis ostraca, there are many examples of this, one found in e.g. προφητίας < προφητείας (OGN I: 73), another one in e.g. ξυλωπωλις < ξυλοπωλη (OGN I: 21) (Pintaudi and Sijpesteijn 1993).

The fourth part, as previously stated, is concerned with the loanwords coming from Semitic and later Arabic into Coptic. It is extremely interesting in its own right, and does extend the understanding of the multilingual contact situation Egypt had over the centuries. Moreover, it indirectly extends knowledge of one level of contact not much discussed in the book: the transfer of phonological features between Egyptian and Greek. Granted, this is from Coptic to Greek rather than the other way around, but evidence of it is visible in the nonstandard renderings of Arabic loanwords in Coptic.

However, if one takes into account the fact that the title of the book is *Greek influence on Egyptian-Coptic*, this part seems to be included with a rather loose connection to the whole. Winand's account (pp. 481–511) of early Semitic loanwords to Egyptian is interesting but I fail to see its connection to Greek in any way. It does include some very interesting statistics, however, among other things, on the low percentage of adjectives in Later Egyptian (p. 483), which ties in quite nicely with Almond's account of the relatively high proportion of adjectives being borrowed from Greek to Coptic (compared to a typical contact situation, if such exists).

Richter's account dealing with Arabic loanwords in Coptic is slightly more connected to the contact with Greek as it, at least, was partially simultaneous. Greek usage was not entirely stopped when that of Arabic emerged. It is also, in addition to its overall interesting character, of some use to Greek linguists:

the phonological transfer effects from Egyptian to Greek can to some extent be verified by the Arabic-Coptic contact. As can be seen in Table 1 (pp. 518–520), the same variation between voiced and voiceless stops is in effect in Coptic renderings of Arabic loanwords as it is with the earlier ones coming from Greek; in the Arabic contact, also the emphatic stops coming from Arabic are often replaced with voiceless stops. It can therefore be concluded for certain that this feature was not explainable through Greek internal phonological features (devoicing in certain contexts, voicing in others) but that it must have been caused by the fact that Coptic did not have this opposition. Another contact effect is the marking of a stressed long vowel with a double vowel grapheme (⟨oo⟩ for stressed /u/) and according to the Coptic phonological practices, often replacing unstressed /o/ with ⟨ou⟩ etc. (more phonological analysis on the Arabic-Coptic contact in Dahlgren 2017: 142–147).

All in all, this book can be highly recommended to anyone aiming to get a grasp of the multilingual situation of Graeco-Roman/Arabic Egypt, including scholars with a background in papyrology, Ancient Greek linguistics, Egyptian linguistics, and general historical linguistics, as well as even linguistic typology. The high standard of this book comes hardly as a surprise, given that it has been compiled, edited and commented on by many of the leading Egyptologists, Coptologists, and linguists in the world. It is all the more surprising, then, that there are some editorial differences between the chapters—footnotes are used excessively instead of parenthetical citations used in e.g. Richter (513–533), for example; there are also two different orthographic forms for referring to verbs borrowed from Greek—'loan verbs' and 'loan-verbs' (Grossman and Richter 2017–236).

A second point to be made is the somewhat unbalanced structure of the book—it might have been better served to include the second part of the book, also largely consisting of cultural background information, in with the first one, and make the book tripartite. No doubt at least the mixed policy of referencing is due to some last minute rush related to the publishing of the volume, and certainly these are minor issues that in no way diminish the value of the book. They are also easily remedied, should there ever be a second edition, which for the sake of the subject gaining a wider audience is sincerely hoped for. In addition, as the present volume constitutes a number of papers connected to the beginning stages of the DDGLC project and the project is a long-lasting one, one seriously hopes there will be more volumes to come from the network of expertise connected with the project.

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